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- 1 Konrad Gunesch, Olena Lytovka, Aleksandra Tyniecka, eds. *Crossing Borders in Gender and Culture*
- 2 Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2018. ISBN-13: 978-1527513556
- 3 Chrysavgi Papagianni
- 4 The advent of postfeminism came with the announcement that feminist activism is no longer needed since women's rights nowadays apparently exist as a birthright. Yet, despite the rights that women have admittedly gained in the developed countries, sexism is still at play albeit in a more concealed way. *Crossing Borders in Gender and Culture* records on the one hand the progress made in gender politics and uncovers, on the other, the need for more. What emerges from the exploration of what Iza Desperak in part three calls "the peripheral gender constructs" (133), is the realization that women in the 21st century are still viewed, consciously or unconsciously, as the "Other." At the same time, the power differentials still hold strong amidst neoliberal politics and economic considerations, the demands of a globalized world and a language that has long and perhaps irreversibly been infiltrated with sexist connotations. All this, pit women against a male-oriented society where they constantly have to prove themselves as equal.
- 5 At first look, the book might appear as an odd compilation of articles and case studies loosely brought together under the all-encompassing focus on gender. From this perspective, the "crossing of borders" announced in the first few words of the title, seems to imply an inevitable fragmentation. A closer look however brings into light the dynamic potential of such a merging as the book opens up space for the study of gender within a global context. As a matter of fact, the five parts of the book look at gender from a wide range of perspectives such as literature, film, language and communication, music, economy and politics. This multiplicity of perspectives together with the multicultural

orientation of the volume's contributors offer a stirring exploration of gender issues and cultural contexts that is in line with current attempts to focus on the local without disregarding the global, and to look for the interconnections, or else, for the insights and common patterns that emerge from such a diverse array of contexts. Thus, what initially might stir concerns appears to be an asset that makes the volume refreshingly different from other works focusing on gender and culture.

- 6 The first part entitled "Literary Representations of Gender," takes a peek at literature. It opens with Anastasia Logotheti's insightful reading of Swift's 2016 novel *Mothering Sunday: A Romance*. A feminist Bildungsroman as Logotheti puts it, the novel turns clichés and gender expectations on their head through its focus on a female protagonist whose artistic ambitions and creative impulse overcome gender confines. The chapter represents an apt opening for the whole book as it situates gender not only within the fictional world of the novel but also within the sociohistorical context of the early twentieth century on which the novel is set. Logotheti rightly views the novel as a counter-narrative that not only casts a revisionary glance at the twentieth century but further absolves Swift, the white, male writer, of gender prejudices. The next chapter by Kathryn Dycus looks at Tweedie's and Wollstonecraft's nineteenth century travel narratives and discusses the feminist and ecofeminist sensibilities that surface in the works. Finally, Davide Nores Cefreda's discussion of the adaptation of Kafka's work in Walter Meierjohann's *Kafka's Monkey* is an apt example of the performativity of gender as Red Peter's character is performed by a female actor. The discussion once again brings into the limelight some of the core aspects of gender studies as well as the nature versus nurture debate that lies at the heart of gender rhetoric.
- 7 Moving away from literature, the second part entitled "Gender Equality and Violence against Women," examines gender vis a vis violence against women. The two chapters in this part look at how women's lives and rights are violated and endangered in Mexico and Japan. More specifically, Anna Hamling discusses gender discrimination in the context of economic development and global capitalism and explains how women fall prey into politics that are informed by gender inequities as they are reduced to expendable human capital. The use of the term *feminicidio* (femicides), is very aptly used to describe not only the violence against the women workers in the city of Juarez but also the state's condoning of such violence due to the specific sociocultural gender constructions that make this kind of violence acceptable. Lisa Hartwig continues in a similar tone by presenting a solid analysis of Japan's fertility politics that successfully sheds light to the intersection between gender, politics and economy. As she mentions, the Japanese government's attempt to promote fertility for the sake of security, infringes on women's basic rights with regards to childbirth and can "exacerbate gender inequality" (87). One cannot miss in this part the call for action for a gender politics that will foster equity and safeguard women's lives and rights.
- 8 Wasniewska and Kudin in the first chapter of part three, "Gender and Communication," offer an interesting, cross-cultural analysis of metaphors that associate women with animals in Slavic, Roman and Germanic languages. Their conclusion that these metaphors are culturally loaded with perceptions about gender roles similar to gender stereotypes and thus affect identity formation, presents an interesting case with regard to the intersectionality between language, gender and culture. The sexist attitudes communicated through language is also the focus of the second chapter by Agata Ewa Wrochna who relies on discourse analysis to illustrate the power differential evident in

the Korean work environment. The Foucauldian emphasis on language as a form of power and oppression lies at the basis of her analysis as she looks at the TV Korean series *Incomplete Life*. The last article in this part by Iza Desperak, transports the discussion on gender to eastern Europe and to the motif of Matka Polka that represents the ideal woman. Desperak discusses the motif's dominant presence in Polish and Ukrainian popular culture and literary tradition offering interesting insights into marginalized constructions of gender that are largely absent from dominant accounts of gender. The third part actually brings together the underlying argument of the book, namely that gender imbalances are still at play in the 21st century since they have permeated language and in extension conceptual constructions and societal structures in a way that unfortunately cannot be easily detected or undone. Shedding more light into such issues and exposing the blind spots of language across cultures as *Crossing Borders* does could be the obvious starting point of an attempt to further eliminate gender bias.

- 9 The fourth part, "Gender Roles in Work and Politics," also opens up space for peripheral gender constructs as its four chapters focus on Russia, Pakistan, Romania and Slovakia. Prosvirkina and Wolfs in the first chapter analyze the presence of Russian women as top bank managers, while Narjis Khatoon in chapter two reveals the existence of discrimination in the workplace that is reflected predominantly through the wage gap between Pakistani male and female workers. Next Andrea-Nicoleta Voina examines women's participation in the Romanian Parliament exposing once again the blind spots of such a participation that as she says is just a propaganda instrument that positions women into places of power, yet precludes real decision making that would really grant them power. Thus, despite the progress made in the country, women's empowerment should be further pursued as this would help promote gender specific interests (182). In the final chapter, Martinska and Nagyova look at Slovakian women in the Armed Forces arguing that women today have largely overcome myths of a supposed physical inferiority and actively participate in a previously male dominated domain. Nevertheless, the distribution in different military professional areas is still unequal, pointing once again to the need for more changes.
- 10 Overall, the chapters in part three and four offer a refreshing and interesting insight into contexts that are largely unknown as they cross the borders from the West to the East. They all emphasize how the global debates on gender have affected the public life of women in countries where feminist activism was stalled due to Communism or politics. The projected optimism with regards to the progress made cannot be missed; and yet the need for more changes and more equality surfaces over and over again. This might be food for thought when it comes to postfeminist rhetoric that feminism is no longer needed. What emerges in these chapters, is a global reality where woman is still the "Other," despite the gains of feminism.
- 11 The fifth and last part of the book, "Gender and Culture," starts with an interesting discussion of female characters in action and adventure films. Konrad Gunesch, employing a comparative approach, maintains that women appear to have better intercultural communication abilities and empathy that is apparently necessarily in the globalized world of today. Chapter two by Middha and Jandial and chapter three by Zisan Arkut revisit the theme of the performativity of gender as they stress how masculinity is a role that can be restrictive not only to women but also to men. The two chapters examine the oppression of male characters in film and in drama respectively. This oppression according to the writers is as a result of gender polarization as well as the

restricting sexual and economic norms constructed by society. Engaging with a totally different topic, the fourth chapter by Sharifi, Shahghasemi and Emamzadeh echoes Said's call for more studies from the East focusing on the West as it investigates the perceptions or "schemata" that Iranian women have of American people without, however, making a direct claim on how gender can be a factor for these perceptions. Nonetheless, the chapter offers an interesting "return of the gaze" as we now take a peek into how the "Other" views the West. Finally, the book closes with Bruno Madureira's chapter and his thought-provoking analysis of women's presence in Portuguese wind Bands before and after the Democratic Revolution in the country. As Madureira looks at how the sociopolitical developments in the country affected specific gender practices the chapter becomes a final reminder of the volume's main premise, namely of how culture and gender is intertwined.

- 12 The multidisciplinary orientation of the chapters makes the book appealing not just to the erudite scholar but also to the general reader that can delve into a cross cultural examination of gender and culture and of gender in cultures. Admittedly, the wide range of topics and contexts might appear overwhelming at first sight. Nevertheless, such an approach comes with benefits if we consider how it sheds light on the connections between these topics and contexts which could make the study and understanding of gender and culture more comprehensive and worthwhile. Overall, *Crossing Borders in Gender and Culture* is a timely contribution to gender studies that brings past and present, East and West, North and South together. Looking at the local, the book makes the issues surrounding gender global, as it successfully brings the periphery into the center of critical attention. To read the book then means to understand how gender stereotyping and exploitation is still at play, albeit in a more covert way that often escapes the eye or even, one could say, the scholar's pen. In this respect, the crossing of borders announced in the title becomes necessary for a deeper understanding of gender and a more thorough consideration of gender politics and schemata. If anything, such a crossing can promote dialogue and make the forms of women's exploitation and rights violation more visible.

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